ERIC Document Resume	See Instruction Sheet	DATE OF RESUME 6/21/65	DATE RECEIVED

A. PUBLICATION DATA

1. ERIC NUMBER	2. ORIGINATOR CONTROL NO(S).	3. IDENTIFICATION NO.
ED000088	7426	N.A.

DO NOT WRITE IN SPACE BELOW

4. AUTHOR(S):
Angell, Robert C.

5. TITLE OF DOCUMENT ABSTRACTED:
The Honors Program at the Univ. of Mich., Its Aims and Procedures

6. PUBLICATION TITLE:
Journal of Higher Education

7. EDITOR(S):
N.A.

8. PLACE OF ORIGIN
ORG. The Univ. of Mich.
ST. Ann Arbor, Mich.
CITY, STATE
TELE. EXT.
INST/LOC CODE

9. PUBLISHER OR SOURCE
The Univ. of Mich

10. VOL.	11. PAGES	12. MO./YR.	13. TOTAL PP.
XXXI	81-87	Feb. 60	7

MICROFILM COPY AVAILABLE
YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT GRANTED
YES ☒ NO ☐

COPYRIGHT RELEASE FILED
YES ☒ NO ☐

TYPE OF REPORT
PROPOSAL ☐
IN-PROGRESS ☐
FINAL ☒
FOLLOW-UP ☐

OTHER ERIC REFERENCES:

ERIC SATELLITE CODE

B. INDEXING DATA

14. SUBJECT AREA

15. TYPE OF ENDEAVOR
report

16. INDEXING TERMS (6-12)

honors programs	admissions	personal relationships		
students	measurement	talent		
identification	student-teacher relations	grade level		

17. ABSTRACT (MAX. 250 WORDS)

Discusses the following aspects of the honors program at the University of Michigan: its origins and history; selection of participants, with attendant problems of constructing adequate criterion of success and best predictors of performance; aims; special courses and sections for freshmen and sophomores; relation between honor students and other students; upperclass honors program; requirements for graduation with honors; and faculty-student liaison.

ERIC No.

18. SOURCE OF ABSTRACT

C. FUNDING DATA

19. SUPPORTING ORGANIZATION	20. DIVISION OR DEPT.	21. CONTRACT NO. / PROJECT NO.
	22. TOTAL COST OF PROJECT	
	23. DURATION OR PROJECT	U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare Office of Education

ERIC Form 1

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
Office of Education

This document has been reproduced exactly as received from the person or organization originating it. Points of view or opinions stated do not necessarily represent official Office of Education position or policy.

Reprinted for private circulation from
JOURNAL OF HIGHER EDUCATION, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, February, 1960

The Honors Program at the University of Michigan

Its Aims and Procedures

By ROBERT C. ANGELL

AMERICAN colleges and universities are moving rapidly toward organizing honors programs. Some of the impetus undoubtedly comes from the Sputniks, but more of it can be attributed to the efforts of the Inter-university Committee on the Superior Student. This group, supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation, has been publishing *The Superior Student* since February, 1958; and its director, Joseph W. Cohen, of the University of Colorado, is spending full time traveling to interested universities to discuss the feasibility of honors programs and to outline various types that can be considered. Three regional conferences have been sponsored by the Committee, the last in Ann Arbor in June, 1959, at which thirty-five universities from the northeastern part of the country were represented.

Honors work in American colleges is not new. Colleges like Swarthmore have had outstanding programs for more than thirty years. A few larger institutions, like the University of Virginia, have also given honors degrees, though often only in a few departments. In the past, almost all institutions, both large and small, have confined their honors work to the junior and senior years.

The new surge of interest has two distinguishing features: it is evident quite as much in large publicly supported universities as in small private colleges; and it is concerned with the whole four-year program, not just the upper-class years. Since the program in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan illustrates both these trends, we may, perhaps, use it as an example of what is going on across the country.

Our College, like many others, has had a few departmental honors programs for a long time. The English honors curriculum, for instance, has been in force for more than a quarter of a century. After the ebb of veteran enrollments about 1950, more and more departments came into the honors fold, until by 1956 half of them had programs. The prospect that others would soon follow did not, however, appear promising enough to a Committee on Curricular Flexibility which had been appointed in 1955. This committee had received complaints from capable upperclassmen who had not been sufficiently challenged intellectually in their

ROBERT C. ANGELL *is director of the Honors Council, University of Michigan.*

freshman and sophomore years. After long study of the whole situation, the Committee made its report in January, 1957, recommending, among other things, that a four-year honors program be set up under the direction of a faculty honors council. This recommendation was approved in February, 1957; the council was appointed; and the first class in the new program was inducted in September of that year.

THE selection of participants is one of the most difficult problems faced by those directing honors programs. There are two principal points of difficulty. The first is to construct an adequate criterion of intellectual success. Usually, the grade-point average is the criterion used, but we at Michigan suspect that it is an inadequate one. We have the strong impression that some who do well as measured by this criterion are rather pedestrian grade-getters, and that some of those outside our program probably deserve to be in it because of their creativity. One research project in an extensive program of evaluation supported by a Carnegie grant is concerned with a comparison of two groups of Freshmen: one group is composed of those whom faculty members have nominated as creative; the other, of students with high marks who are not considered creative. We shall be studying these groups to see whether there are any differentiating factors in the material presented at entrance to the University. If we find such factors, we can improve our process of selection. In any event, we shall continue to be interested in the attempts psychologists are making to test for creativity or critical thinking or originality.

Even if the criterion of success were satisfactory, there is the second problem of discovering the best predictors of successful performance. Many schools have found that test scores and the high-school record are about equally predictive, and that in combination they give more reliable results than can be obtained by the use of either one singly. Though we have been very careful in our procedures and have taken the best advice in weighing the various factors, we still have many students among those who are selected prior to entrance who do not make a *B* average in their first year at the University. The performance of those taken into the honors program after one or more semesters at the university is, of course, much better because of the predictive value of success in work at the college level. One of the new instruments we are experimenting with is the Opinion, Attitude, Interest Survey developed by Benno G. Fricke of the University of Michigan's Bureau of Psychological Services. The Academic Personality Scale derived from this instrument appears to be a helpful supplement to the usual tests.

Though we know it can be improved, our present procedure at Michigan is as follows. We start by taking roughly 8 per cent of the entering class. This is done in three stages: (1) In the spring, prior to their entrance into college, we invite all the National Merit Award winners—fifteen to twenty students—who have application forms on file to partici-

pate in the honors program. We examine the credentials of the Certificate winners from Michigan who have applied for admission, and attempt to identify those who seem to have the necessary motivation—about two-thirds of the group. (2) In our program of summer orientation and registration (in which more than half of all Freshmen take part), we give a battery of tests the results of which can be used with high-school records, College Board and National Merit scores, principals' recommendations, and autobiographical material in the application form in making selections. (3) At the close of summer orientation and before fall registration, we write letters of invitation to students with outstanding College Board or National Merit scores who have not attended summer orientation. This is the smallest of the three groups. Relatively few of the Freshmen selected by these three methods decline the invitation to join the program.

The sifting process goes on throughout the first three semesters. The credentials of all those whose grade average is half *A*, half *B*, or better during their first or second semester are scrutinized, and the students who seem likely to maintain a high level of performance are chosen. Those who have not maintained a *B* average are dropped at the end of the second or third semester.

The general aim of our honors program is, of course, to give the superior student opportunities commensurate with his abilities throughout his undergraduate career. During the freshman and sophomore years, the principal opportunities consist in the privilege of attending special courses and special sections of large introductory courses. The sections are of two kinds: special recitation and laboratory sections connected with large lecture courses, and special sections of courses without lectures in which the honors students are grouped together in an arrangement which provides for flexibility, since the teacher is not committed to a schedule determined by the lecture sequence.

The special courses are of two kinds also. Most of them are simply more difficult than departmental courses. Such courses are now offered in astronomy, chemistry, mathematics, psychology, and sociology. In general, the aim is to give a more thorough grounding than is usually possible. The students study original documentary sources, have an opportunity to do special laboratory work, and are presented with additional theoretical material. Though some of them are fearful that their grades will suffer, this does not actually happen. The grades honors students receive in honors classes are as good as those they receive in regular classes.

In addition to the departmental courses, a small number of interdisciplinary courses are especially developed for honors students. Two contrasting types will suffice to show the possibilities they present. One of our successful courses, taught by a professor of English, deals with the Renaissance in all its aspects—historical, literary, philosophical, artistic, scientific. Another course is entitled Revolutionary Ideas in Science. Its general theme is evolution—it covers the subject from the

evolution of matter in the stellar universe to the evolution of species on the earth. The course is taught by men from four departments.

After three semesters we give our students the opportunity to do summer reading for credit in one course. They enroll in May, receive instructions from the professor, do their work off campus, and take an examination in the fall.

The members of the Honors Council also act as faculty counselors. Since most of them advise only about fifteen underclassmen, they are able to give a good deal of attention to such matters as choice of career and long-range planning in addition to the usual advice on selection of courses.

ONE of the most difficult questions in connection with honors programs is to what degree honors students should be treated as a separate group outside the classroom. In some institutions they reside with their fellows, have their own browsing library, and are given special identification cards that admit them to library stacks and allow them to register early; in others, they are given no special privileges once they leave the recitation room or laboratory. At the University of Michigan we have tried to follow a middle course. Our honors students are not housed together, but they have occasional evening functions which are both intellectual and social in character. Usually there is a distinguished faculty speaker present, sometimes a visiting dignitary. Two privileges that have apparently meant little to the students are the right to use a special study room in the Undergraduate Library and the opportunity of attending occasional discussion groups led by faculty members. The study room is not frequented, and only a few of the discussions have been well attended. There are indications that our honors classes keep many students so busy that they are loath to give the time to what amount to short, non-credit courses.

Although our students make many friendships within the honors group because they are thrown together in classes, they are by no means tightly knit. As pioneers, the first class had a good deal of *esprit de corps* in its freshman year, but now there seems to be only a moderate sense of solidarity. Actually, many regular students do not know which of the residents in their dormitory corridor are honors students, and many of the honors students are willing to let it go at that.

There is great variation among American colleges in the character of honors programs for the junior and senior years. In some, the programs are wholly departmental and no attempt is made to ensure breadth beyond the requirements set for all students; in others, breadth is the chief objective, and the honors degree symbolizes it. In at least one institution, the University of Colorado, the student can take his choice of either or both types of honors programs.

Our Honors Council has found this problem concerning the nature of the upper-class program difficult. We have again elected to follow a middle course. Since the University of Michigan has a strong departmental

tradition, removing the power to award degrees from the hands of departments was never considered. The Council has, therefore, worked out a system in which it retains general supervision over honors work in the upper-class years and delegates to the departments responsibility for depth in the student's training. The Council retains responsibility for breadth.

The Council has set broad standards both for admission to honors concentration in departments and for honors degrees. Departments are permitted to choose their candidates for honors degrees any time between the beginning of the junior year and the following April. The students must have a straight *B* average up to this point, and a *B*+ average in courses previously taken in the field of concentration. At the request of a department, the director of the Council may waive these requirements in particular cases. The students are counseled by faculty members in their departments of concentration.

The decision concerning the type of honors opportunity to be offered the student is left to the several departments. Well-established programs in such subjects as English and psychology proceed in their accustomed way. Departments in the process of setting up programs consult with the director of the Honors Council about their plans. Practices vary over a wide range, from a sequence of honors courses, through seminars of various sorts, to independent study and laboratory experimentation. Most programs emphasize the preparation of extensive theses or research reports.

The requirements for graduation with honors are as follows: demonstrated ability in original work or in a comprehensive departmental examination and a *B*+ average in departmental courses. Departments may recommend honors or high honors. There are at present three interdisciplinary programs, none of them pre-professional, that may recommend honors degrees. Students in preprofessional programs who have a high academic average can earn a diploma "with distinction."

The Council's concern for breadth of training in the last two years is so great that we are using part of our Carnegie grant to employ a professor of English part time for two years to work out ways and means of keeping honors students from becoming too narrowly specialized. He has proposed increasing the number of interdisciplinary honors courses for upperclassmen. At present we have only one, General Systems Theory. He will explore the possibilities for colloquia cutting across disciplines, rigorous departmental courses for non-specialists, and extracurricular meetings and discussions that would encourage breadth. Scholars visiting the campus constitute a resource that we hope to use extensively. On one memorable occasion Mrs. Roosevelt chatted informally with groups of honors students to their great delight and benefit. If we succeed in multiplying such experiences, we hope that by the time he receives his degree, the honors student will have had an education approaching in breadth that of students who take a general honors degree in other institutions.

In operating any honors program, the faculty concerned should be in close touch with the students. This can be achieved partly through counseling, but it is also useful to have some centralized medium for contact between the two groups. At Michigan we have provided for this by setting up the Student Steering Committee, which meets with the director monthly or oftener. This committee of twelve is elected each year in March by vote of the Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors in the program. The Committee brings questions raised by the students to the attention of the director, advises him on matters that are causing him concern, and plays a minor administrative role. The Committee has been helpful in our experimentation with extra-curricular intellectual opportunities, and we may soon put this whole program in its hands.

SINCE four-year honors programs are still in an experimental stage, constant evaluation of them is demanded. There is ample room for improvement, not only in the procedures used in selecting students, but also in the program of education. We have reached the end of the first year of a three-year program of evaluation made possible by the Carnegie grant. Among many studies we are planning is one that other institutions might find a worth-while undertaking. We have identified students in the class of 1960 who would have been selected for an honors program as Freshmen had there been one, and are testing and interviewing them so that they can be compared with our first honors participants at equivalent stages in their academic careers. Thus we hope to determine whether our honors program is having any detectable effect.

Our main purpose, however, is to study the curriculum of our program to discover how well it is succeeding. The College has a regular system by which students evaluate their courses anonymously every third semester. Last February we were given access to these evaluations for the honors classes of the previous fall semester, and a research assistant made a careful analysis of them. She also interviewed most of the professors who had taught the courses. For the most part, the faculty thought that honors sections of introductory lecture courses were frequently related too closely to the regular course routine; that class-size should be kept down to fifteen if possible; and that there should be more flexibility in approving elective courses for honors students. Some thought that the counselors did not make sufficient use of their power to waive prerequisites; others believed that we should seriously consider the use of a system of achievement tests both for placement in courses and for credit in lieu of course work.

The counseling of honors students is a phase of the program that needs continuing study. Problems arise, for instance, when the counselor has so few students to advise that he cannot acquire enough experience to become expert in handling matters involving curricular requirements and record-keeping. We discovered that we faced a dilemma in choosing between the alternatives of having the professor counsel in our central

office with good technical assistance and having him counsel in his own office with its scholarly atmosphere but no technical assistance. We are resolving this problem by arranging for him to counsel in the central office during the periods of course elections and course changes, and in his own office the rest of the time, when long-term academic and career plans can be discussed.

The non-academic aspects of honors programs need scrutiny too. Students are social as well as intellectual beings. Their relationship to their fellows is important, in itself and in its influence on intellectual growth. Problems of *esprit de corps*, social status among undergraduates generally, and personal adjustment are worth investigating.

One of the arguments used against honors programs is that they are costly, and that it is unfair to rob the poorer students to give greater opportunity to the superior ones. It cannot be denied that they are expensive, but perhaps they are less so than most people suppose. At Michigan, the office staff consists of a half-time director, a full-time administrative assistant, and a clerk-typist. Depending on the rank of the director, such an organization costs from $14,000 to $17,000 a year. All students have advisers, but it is true that honors students receive more counseling than most. It is hard to estimate the cost of this in terms of faculty time: perhaps $6,000 would cover it. Computing teaching expenses is also a matter of estimating the cost that is additional for students who take three-fifths of their work in honors, instead of regular, sections. Honors classes tend to be small, which may, perhaps, make the instruction one and a half times as expensive. It is also true that the faculty rank of those who teach in honors programs is usually higher than the rank of those who teach in the conventional program, but no added expense is incurred as a result of this since regular faculty members are assigned to the program. If we compute the educational cost at Michigan per undergraduate to be $520 per student and assume that there are 750 students in the honors program at one time, the additional cost per student is roughly $186, an increase of 36 per cent.

THE College faculty at the University of Michigan approved the establishment of an honors program, and has co-operated loyally in making it a reality. There have been doubts and criticisms, of course, but far fewer than might have been expected. Those who believe that we should have put the student much more on his own contend that we have not broken drastically enough with tradition. But the general climate of opinion is a cautious one; the faculty believes that we will make surer progress by testing each step carefully before taking another. The Honors Council is conscious of the need for prudence, and has curbed any latent tendencies to proceed too rapidly. As a result, our program will probably not make any headlines, but we hope that its foundations will prove solid enough to support more unorthodox structures when the time is ripe.